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EU Unveils Roadmap for Sustainable Agriculture

EU Commits to Implementing Sustainable Agriculture Reforms

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This week, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, received the final report from the strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture in the European Union. The report, titled "A shared prospect for farming and food in Europe" was presented by Professor Peter Strohschneider, the chair of the dialogue group, and outlines the challenges and opportunities facing the agricultural sector. It also provides key recommendations to guide the Commission in shaping its Vision for Agriculture and

Food, set to be unveiled within the first 100 days of von der Leyen's second term.

The strategic dialogue, which began in January 2024, involved 29 participants from diverse sectors, including representatives from agri-food industries, civil society, rural communities, and European academia. Despite polarization surrounding agricultural policy, the group reached a consensus on critical issues affecting the sector. The report emphasizes the need for continued dialogue and trust among stakeholders to create solutions that support the development of a more competitive, resilient, diverse, and sustainable agri-food system across the EU. The European Commission has committed to incorporating these recommendations as it develops a new dialogue platform that will include civil society and the scientific community, with the goal of advancing strategies for strengthening the sustainability and resilience of agriculture in Europe.



Peter Strohschneider, on the left, and Ursula von der Leyen, during the press conference

Central to the report is the acknowledgment that agriculture and food production are vital to Europe's security and society. The diversity of agricultural products across the continent is seen as a key strength. Participants agreed that economic, social, and environmental sustainability in the sector can reinforce one another if policies are

consistent and well-crafted. Markets, food habits, and innovation also play an important role in fostering sustainability, and the report highlights the need for alignment between public policies and these broader trends.

Among the key recommendations, the report calls for greater cooperation to ensure a sustainable, resilient, and competitive future for agriculture. It stresses the importance of adapting the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to current conditions, which are increasingly defined by the need for sustainable practices and competitive markets. The report also emphasizes the need to enhance farmers' positions within the value chain, improve access to financing, and promote international trade while upholding global standards.

Another recommendation is to promote sustainable agri-food systems, including sustainable farming practices, improved animal welfare, and encouraging consumers to adopt more balanced and sustainable diets. The role of consumers in driving agricultural sustainability is becoming more pronounced, and the report advocates for policies that support these choices.

The report also highlights the importance of building transformative resilience in response to increasing environmental, climate, and geopolitical risks. It suggests strengthening risk and crisis management tools, protecting agricultural land, and promoting innovative techniques, such as crop improvement, to safeguard the sector against future challenges. This focus on resilience is seen as essential for ensuring the long-term viability of European agriculture.

Attracting a new generation of farmers and ensuring diversity within the agricultural workforce is another key area of focus. The report calls for policies that promote generational renewal, gender equality, and the revitalization of rural areas. Protecting workers' rights in the agricultural sector is also emphasized as critical to maintaining the sector's appeal as a viable career choice.

Finally, the report underscores the need to improve access to knowledge and innovation, particularly through digitalization. Digital tools, it argues, offer significant opportunities to make the agri-food sector more efficient and sustainable. Widespread adoption of these technologies is encouraged to drive forward innovation and

competitiveness.

The recommendations in the report are directed at the European Commission, the European Parliament, EU member states, and all relevant stakeholders, and provide a framework for guiding future policies in the agri-food sector. The strategic dialogue, first announced by President von der Leyen in her 2023 State of the Union address, addressed four key questions: how to improve the prospects of farmers and rural communities, how to support agriculture within environmental limits, how to better leverage technological innovation, and how to secure a competitive future for Europe's food system in a global context.

The process involved plenary sessions with all participants and working groups to address these questions in depth. President von der Leyen participated in several of these meetings to monitor progress closely, and Professor Strohschneider held discussions with a wide range of stakeholders, including agricultural ministers, European commissioners, and members of the European Parliament. This inclusive approach was designed to ensure broad input and participation in the report's development.

As the European Union faces growing challenges related to climate change, geopolitical instability, and economic uncertainty, the report provides a roadmap for reforming the agricultural and food sectors. It calls for cooperation, sustainability, and innovation to build a sector that feeds Europe while also meeting global challenges.

The report will inform the Commission's work in crafting its Vision for Agriculture and Food, a key component of the EU's broader Green Deal. This Vision will guide European agriculture toward a future that is more sustainable, resilient, and competitive, in line with the EU's goal of becoming the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.